

A Cavalry Tradition at the University of Massachusetts

by retired LTC Thomas R. Rozman

Today as one walks the University of Massachusetts campus, it is a stretch to imagine that the school, through its Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Program and cadet corps, has a noteworthy horse-cavalry tradition that spanned some 22 years. From the period immediately following World War I as Massachusetts Agricultural College until 1931, then until the beginning of World War II as Massachusetts State College, ROTC cadets who continued to commissioning, most as Officer Reserve Corps second lieutenants, commissioned into the horse-cavalry branch of the Army. The mounted tradition continued at the school in its ultimate post-World War II configuration as the University of Massachusetts in a form until the early 1960s, when the school trained officers to be commissioned in the Armor Branch.

During these years – the university being a Morrill Act land-grant school – all able-bodied male students were required to complete the first two years of the ROTC program on campus. A good number of the cadets then voluntarily continued in the last two years of the program until graduation. Upon graduation and successful completion of the pre-commissioning program, most were commissioned in the Officer Reserve Corps, a federal National Army establishment embodied in the post-World War I National Defense Act. Some cadets did acquire Regular Army commissions over these years, and National Guard commissions could be sought.



Figure 1. Massachusetts State College ROTC cadet and mount in 1941.

Relative to on-campus cavalry training, all the necessary equipment and cavalry mounts were maintained on the campus. Necessary logistic support was provided by Fort Ethan Allen, VT, then an active Regular Army installation and a cavalry post in the heart of Morgan Horse country some 220 miles away to the north of the University of Massachusetts. For summer training, the cadet mounted unit would road-march the 220-mile distance to the post in Winooski, VT.

The school's Military Department's officers and noncommissioned officers, and the Regular Army officers and cavalymen of the garrison regiment at the fort (1st Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment) through much of this period provided the military instruction and training.

Dismounted training was conducted as well. The entire cadet corps could not be mounted, nor was that a feasible program to support. The logistics if basic-course cadets were included would be that of a regiment, too great of an expense for the times.



Figure 2. A Massachusetts State College dismounted review in 1941. Note all cadets are wearing riding britches.

On graduation and commissioning, most of the new Officer Reserve Corps cavalry second lieutenants were assigned to 315th Cavalry Regiment, a Reserve Army cavalry regiment organized in New England. The regiment was initially organized in 1917 during World War I at Fort D.A. Russell near Cheyenne, WY. After the war, the regiment was reorganized in the Reserve Army in New England. The cadet corps at Massachusetts Agricultural College, then Massachusetts State College, was the primary new officer feeder program for 315th Cavalry Regiment throughout the interwar period.

Interestingly, though the flesh-and-blood mounts of the pre-war period were no longer – as the college, then university, returned to regular academic operations post-war – it did remain a mounted-arm school. As mentioned, the school organized its training around the Army's newly created Armor Branch, a post-war integration of the Cavalry Branch and the World War II Tank Corps and Tank Destroyer Branch. Until the program went branch-immaterial, six M41 Walker Bulldog tanks supported the on-campus program.

Today, as one walks the university's campus, this colorful and proud mounted-arm tradition is nowhere in evidence. Given that more than a few of these cavalry alumni distinguished themselves in World War II and subsequently, this seems a misplaced oversight.

Retired LTC Tom Rozman is employed as the principle, TRR and Associates, LLC. He has served as director, Collective Training Directorate, Deputy Chief of Staff for Training, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, VA; force-development officer for infantry and lethality systems, Department of the Army Armored Family of Vehicles Task Force, Pentagon and Fort Eustis, VA; assistant G-3, 1st Armored Division, Ansbach, Germany; battalion executive officer and acting commander, 1-46 Mech, Erlangen, Germany; battalion executive officer, 2-6 Mech, Erlangen; and commander, Company A, 1-58 Mech, Fort

Benning, GA. His military schooling includes Command and General Staff Officer's Course, Infantry Officer's Advanced Course, Infantry Officer's Basic Course, Parachute School and Ranger School. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in engineering from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, and a master's of business administration from the University of Massachusetts. His awards and honors include the Legion of Merit and three awards of the Meritorious Service Medal.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ROTC – Reserve Officer's Training Corps